



*Always Ready  
Always There*

# *The Gem State Guardian*

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## **Shoes for Cambodia**

by Staff Sgt. Krista Fletcher

Vanessa Munro, a recipient of the Idaho National Guard Youth Volunteer of the Year Award, had to come up with an idea for her individual service project for the National Honor Society.



After hearing stories from her mother, Lt. Col. Heidi Munro, a Physician's Assistant with the Idaho National Guard who has made multiple trips to Cambodia participating in Angkor Sentinel; an annual bilateral U.S./Cambodia military exercise, one story stood out for Vanessa that helped to shape the project.

"I decided I wanted to do a project that would actually have a big effect, so I asked my mom for help. She told me about her friend in Cambodia, Nary, a runner, and about how expensive shoes are in Cambodia. That's when I decided what I wanted to do!" Vanessa came up with a concept called "Shoes for Cambodia."

Her goal was to collect 100 pairs of shoes in time to send back with her



Members of the Idaho National Guard present running shoes to national Olympic Marathon runners and other national athletes in Cambodia during Angkor Sentinel 14 as part of "Shoes for Cambodia," a project conceived by Vanessa Munro. Photo by Sgt. Kelsey Vanderwiel

mother to Cambodia during 2014's Angkor Sentinel exercise.

A senior at Timberline High, she set a stand up at school to begin collecting shoes. Much to her surprise, she exceeded her goal by collecting nearly 300 pairs. Placing the running shoes into six duffle bags, Lt. Col. Munro headed back to Cambodia.

During Angkor Sentinel, she distributed five of the six duffle bags to Cambodian Soldiers and staff members. The remaining duffle bag was saved for a special group.

After completing the military exercise, Munro and a few fellow Idaho Guard Soldiers met with a group of national athletes, along with two Olympic marathon

runners who train at the Olympic Stadium in Phnom Penh.

Ly Nary and Hem Bunting both run with the Cambodian National Athletic Team. Nary is the first officially acknowledged female Cambodian marathon runner, and is an accomplished research scientist. Bunting is a national athlete, who made his first Olympic appearance in the 2008 Beijing Games. He made international news when he almost could not compete due to lack of running shoes. And not only does Bunting train at the Olympic Stadium in Phnom Penh, he also resides there, sharing a room with about 30 other athletes, a common arrangement for Olympic hopefuls in Cambodia.

Through the incredible efforts of Vanessa's project and support from the students at Timberline High School, running shoes were given to Cambodian soldiers, national athletes, and Olympians. "When we saw how excited our Cambodian friends were to receive a pair of running shoes, it only made us wish we'd brought more," Lt. Col. Munro said. "Next year we're going to try to extend the project, with hopes of bringing enough pairs for all our soldier counterparts as well as members of the National Team."

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